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Jefferson County, Port Townsend are Washington's Solar Energy Leaders

OLYMPIA, Sept. 9, 2010 – Jefferson County and its sole incorporated city, Port Townsend, are Washington's solar energy leaders, judging by the number of certified renewable energy projects per capita.

Jefferson County had 87 certified projects as of Sept. 1, 2010, one project for every 337 residents. This includes 67 projects in Port Townsend, one for every 134 residents.

San Juan County ranked second among counties at one project for every 434 residents, followed by Klickitat County at one per 466 residents, Clallam County at one per 922 and Island County at one per 1,287.

While King County had the greatest number of projects at 479, that equals one project for every 4,036 people due to its large population.

Port Townsend was named Washington Solar City of the Year in 2009 by the Washington State University Extension Energy Program. The Energy Program reviews renewable energy project applications for the Washington State Department of Revenue.

Other cities with at least 30 projects include Bellingham at 62, Sequim at 47, Olympia at 45, Redmond at 40, Spokane at 39, and Anacortes at 33.

The rankings are based on 1,530 renewable energy projects certified by the Department of Revenue since a series of state tax incentives were enacted beginning in 2005. Nearly all the projects involved solar energy, with only a handful being wind-related.

The number of applications for certification – necessary to receive some of the benefits of the state incentives – has been climbing. A total of 754 projects were certified from 2005 through 2008, and 421 were certified in 2009. So far in 2010, 379 projects have been certified with another dozen or so under review.

Jefferson County's high ranking stems partially from the benefits of the Olympic Mountains "rain shadow," which also covers Sequim in adjoining Clallam County.

Port Townsend and Sequim have more sunshine than any other location in Western Washington, according to Jeff Randall of Power Trip Energy, a Port Townsend electrical contractor specializing in solar power installations.

The favorable climate, coupled with federal and state incentives, higher traditional energy costs, and interest in alternative energy options have made solar power attractive to a growing number of residents, he said.

"It jumps to people's minds – we live in a sunny place, maybe solar will work here," Randall said. "This is electricity we don't need to buy from out of state, and the money invested stays in local communities"

Incentives include federal credits, state sales tax exemptions on the purchase of certain equipment and payments for each kilowatt-hour produced from a customer-generated electricity renewable energy system.

More information on the state incentives is available at <http://dor.wa.gov/Content/FindTaxesAndRates/TaxIncentives/IncentivePrograms.aspx#Energy> and at www.energy.wsu.edu.

A legislatively mandated annual report on participation in the incentives is available at http://dor.wa.gov/docs/reports/2009/Renewable_Energy_2009.pdf.

The number of projects by county and city is available at <http://dor.wa.gov/Content/AboutUs/newsroom/html/EnergyProjects.aspx>.

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